DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 820 JC 740 129

AUTHOR Christensen, Alphus R.
TITLE Change is Possible: Survival through Coalition with a Public Community College District.
INSTITUTION Rio Grande Coll., Ohio.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; Educational Change; *Private Colleges; *Public Education; Public Schools; State Laws

ABSTRACT

An account of the steps which were taken to make Rio Grande College eligible to operate a public community college on its campus is provided by the president of the college. Meeting code requirements in the State, determining the reaction of citizens, surveying the district to determine the need for the community college, and meeting objections from the Ohio Board of Regents are all described. The fact that Rio Grande College is a private college seeking to operate a public community college caused difficulties in establishing eligibility. Suggestions to other private colleges seeking eligibility are made. (SW)

ED 089820

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE
SURVIVAL THROUGH COALITION WITH A PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Alphus R. Christensen, President
Rio Grande College
Rio Grande, Ohio

JC 740 129

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Survival Through Coalition With A Public Community College District

Alphus R. Christensen
President
Rio Grande College
Rio Grande, Ohio

Effecting change in educational policy, particularly if the direction is non-traditional and unique, is difficult. It is much easier to move a cemetery. For more than 29 months we, at Rio Grande College, have been working to initiate a program which would be mutually beneficial to the State of Ohio and to private higher education. Right now all we can say is that the Ohio Board of Regents is rapidly approaching the point in time when it must make a decision.

At the turn of this decade, it was rather obvious that certain trends forecast a possible ominous future for private higher education---unfavorable birthrate statistics, peaking tuition and fees, an accelerating percentage of students choosing to attend public-assisted institutions, impending elimination of the draft, and the mushrooming of public community and technical colleges. Currently, you can add to these trends an economic inflation which is horrendous. Some private colleges and universities have reacted by shutting up shop, merging, image-changing, or affiliating with state systems. Firm figures on these numbers are hard to ascertain. Furthermore, unless measures are taken to correct and check this apparently inevitable trend many more private colleges and universities will appear in the obituary column. And as this occurs, it will be grossly unfair and untrue to categorize all these institutions as marginal. For 98 years, Rio Grande College has been an educational and cultural oasis in the Appalachian sector of Ohio. Frankly, I didn't relish what the future might portend for Rio Grande College.

I thought, I read, I interrogated, I sought advice, I pondered---yet I couldn't come up with anything I could wrap my mind around as a possible course of action to insure the future of Rio Grande College as a private four-year institution. The only thing that kept cropping up in my ruminations was "community colleges were growing faster than any other type of post-secondary institutions." I decided to examine the Ohio Revised Code.

During the next several weeks I studied the Chapters in the Ohio Revised Code pertaining to education, particularly community colleges. When I ran into a knotty legal problem, I sought an attorney's opinion. Finally I was convinced that Rio Grande College was eligible to contract with the Regents to operate a public community college on its campus if "two ifs" could be satisfied: (a) if Rio Grande College could be defined as a "public university or college"; (b) if we could construct a district which would meet the requirements of the state statutes. Responding to my inquiry I was informed by the Attorney General's office that Rio Grande College met the qualifications of the definition of a "general public university or college." I might inject here this definition was developed to assist all higher education institutions through the lease back of lands for educational purposes which had been conveyed to the State. Your Code may reveal an equally appropriate definition. Even before I had obtained the Attorney General's opinion, I had studied the map of the state to see whether or not I could create a district which would meet all the Code requirements; I found I could with four contiguous counties including the home county of Rio Grande College. Next I quizzed interested and influential citizens in the four counties as to the feasibility of the idea; the reaction was affirmative.

Early in October 1971, I discussed the idea with the Chancellor of the Board of Regents. Several meetings later he told me that he could find no legal barriers to the proposal. He said we could request the Regents to create the district either by a referendum or by a joint resolution passed by the Boards of County Commissioners of the four counties. I chose the latter method. I designed the resolution and with the assistance of interested citizens the joint resolution requesting the creation of the district was passed unanimously by the four Boards of County Commissioners. This joint resolution was submitted to the Office of the Chancellor in February, 1972. The Board of Regents at its March 1972 meeting moved to table consideration of the joint resolution. However, at its June 1972 meeting the joint resolution creating the community college district was approved unanimously.

This decision, arrived at by the Regents, is an important juncture in the process because as soon as the Secretary of State certifies as to the action, the district becomes a separate and distinct political subdivision; thusly, the district acquires all the powers accorded a body corporate. Within thirty days the certification had been obtained and within ninety days of certification the Boards of County Commissioners and the Governor had appointed the nine members to the Board of Trustees of Rio Grande Community College.

At one of our meetings, the Chancellor had suggested that we obtain funds to analyze and study the needs of the proposed district. We were reluctant to move in this direction until the establishment of the district. With this accomplished our Development Office moved rapidly to contact potential sources for these funds. Only a limited number of these contacts were made before one of them agreed to grant us $25,000.

The source reasoned this innovation would not only be valuable to Rio Grande College, but that it might serve as a model for other private colleges and universities in the country. I have been informed by the President, Dr. Gleazer, American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, that to the best of his knowledge no similar arrangement exists. He did point out that Union College, New Jersey, had a contract with the State of New Jersey to provide community college services, but that Union College was, and always had been, a two-year institution not a baccalaureate degree-granting institution.

A professional consulting firm was employed to conduct an independent study of the District. With the assistance of a spirited citizens' committee men and women from the four counties, the survey was completed in record time---less than half estimated by the consulting firm. The survey provided us with a plethora of information which we have used in our plan and which we have shared with many of the high schools in the District; however, the most gratifying conclusion of the study confirmed the feasibility and need for public community college services in the District. This survey plus the Official Community College Plan, which was designed and written by the citizens' committee, the Community College Trustees and Rio Grande College personnel, was delivered to the Office of the Chancellor February 14, 1973. The Regents at its April (1973) meeting chose to table consideration of the Plan. However, it (the Board of Regents) later (July 1973) resolved that action on this Plan must be taken no later than May,1974.

Presently we enroll annually about 60 to 65 first-time, full-time students from this four-county area. In the Fall of 1973, one hundred fifty-eight (158) District students took advantage of the Trustee Grant.

As a result we had the second largest freshmen class in the history of the college and our total student enrollment increased---something which hadn't happened for several years. In other words, we ran counter to what was happening statewide and nationally.

The reluctance of the Regents to adopt this plan quickly is understandable and reasonable. This is a new educational concept---a break with tradition. In a sense, an action that creates a new relationship between the public and the private systems of higher education. A very serious step which might be considered to have deeper and more permanent connotations. Generally, it is the abstract and philosophical objections which are more difficult to resolve because they cannot be affirmed or denied by reality. An affirmation could cause other private colleges to seek a similar or related recourse. Further, an affirmation results in the issuance of a charter---and this is the point of no return.

Concrete and specific objections can be handled practically. It is a legal requirement that private and public monies cannot be co-mingled; consequently, the contract provides procedures for not violating this requirement. In addition the contract recognizes the possibility that a tax levy might not be approved by the patrons of the District with the inclusion of an Article which requests the Rio Grande Community College Board of Trustees to dissolve the District if the levy is not approved within a reasonable period of time.

Probably the most realistic pressure for the denial of the contract stems from the state system of higher education. A state legislative body specifies appropriations; often it is difficult to get this body to bake a larger appropriations pie. This means if others obtain some of the appropriations the slices will be smaller. This is a sound argument because public-assisted colleges and universities need more money.

Unless the legislative body appropriates more money, the merits of the proposal must be evaluated carefully before reaching a decision. It is possible that such an evaluation, as this Plan tenders, could be used for additional persuasion to cause the legislature to increase appropriations for higher education. The specter of decreasing enrollments is a tangible factor. The current problem of Southern Illinois University bears witness to this; rightly or wrongly---the public community colleges seems to offer more of what the people want. Thusly, positive answers for policy-making bodies do not come easy.

Recently the Boards of Rio Grande College and Rio Grande Community College submitted a revised contract which ameliorated the sticky objections propounded by the Office of the Chancellor and the Ohio Board of Regents; therefore, early action is in the offing---hopefully affirmative. Then within 75 days we shall go to the patrons of the District for approval or rejection of the tax levy---the last step in a long and tedious procedure. An affirmative response by the patrons would mean instant public community college services for the program would be implemented with the beginning of the next academic year. Contrast this with normal procedure---public community college services would not be available for a minimum of two or three years; you know, architects have to be chosen, buildings have to be designed and constructed, staffs must be assembled.

I believe our experience might have something to offer other private colleges and universities. Study your state statutes---probably you can follow the same procedure. Maybe you will have to work to make minor changes in the law. An examination of your Codes may give rise to other courses of action. Anything you can suggest which will save the taxpayers money is a plus. Some time ago, months after we had begun our action, our

neighbor, West Virginia, moved to initiate and accelerate a public community college program. Frankly, I was disappointed in what appeared to me indifference or lack of aggressiveness on the part of the private higher education sector of that state, when the policy-making bodies of that state came forth with a plan which ignored private colleges and universities. I am inclined to believe the public community college program will be around for quite a while since it tends to reflect the wants and needs of its patrons. Private colleges and universities can gear themselves to get a piece of the action. A significant advantage is that private colleges and universities can react more quickly, as effectively, and more economically than can a public system. Both systems of higher education must be preserved to insure choice.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

MAY 9 1974

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION